



Evergreen Ever Growing

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, July 28, 2008

City Hall Diary

Vice Mayor Dave Cortese wins the prize for having the most historical knowledge of his district. I had the opportunity to tour District 8 with the vice mayor and get a better understanding of the land we call Evergreen and its agricultural history.

The housing boom started in 1975 with single family houses galore. Transportation congestion quickly became an issue. In 1993, there was the open allocation which allowed the building of an additional 3,900 houses that were swallowed up by the market. Part of the reason for housing development was the change in the cost of water to Evergreen farms from an agricultural rate to market rate. The cost was \$60 per acre foot of water and then rose to \$600 per acre foot. Evergreen farms at the time were competing with central valley farms who paid \$12 an acre foot for water. Try selling cherries against other farms when you're paying 50 times as much for water. Therefore, farmers had an incentive to sell their land for housing. (Should we subsidize water to save local farms and open space?)

We drove through the neighborhoods that were built in that 1993 allocation and I must say that there was some good planning. I saw large parks, trails and attractive homes. If you are in the market for a house in San Jose and value parks, you should consider Evergreen. During this build-out, the developers paid for much of the infrastructure and even funded maintenance.

The schools are supported by a Mello-Roos district set up for 1993 housing allocation. Evergreen High benefits from this district and is physically impressive and has a great reputation for academics.

The problems of Hwy 101 congestion are huge. The Cortese's plan of pooling land owners and developers to create a larger community benefit for infrastructure investments made more sense after our tour. No single development can fix the aggregate infrastructure problems. The Berg property, for example, is not the best location for industry.

However, since the prior council converted so much industrial land, there was a case to hold on to it. Now that the housing market has crashed, I would imagine this property will sit for a while, unless new, fast-growing, cutting-edge companies like Tesla Motors or Infinera see the value of a large parcel with incredible hillside views.

Evergreen has three sides. One is farmland that still remains in a pristine state as part of the greenbelt. The second is modern luxury housing, like Silver Creek, with predominately affluent families. The third is more working class, eastside-type housing, like we saw on Rigoletto by Eastridge. This SNI area had a fatal shooting of a 15-year-old. Since then, the Rigoletto initiative has been launched with police to combat crime in this neighborhood. Surprising to me was that there are very few apartments in District 8 in comparison to the rest of the city.

The Eastridge area has gained new restaurants, allowing for people to eat out without trekking to downtown, and has had success with locating luxury car dealerships, like Infiniti and Mercedes. I have to say that Eastridge is looking really nice. Every store space was full and it is ultra clean. Outstanding questions for this specific neighborhood are: Will the VTA fund the extension of light rail to Eastridge? Will the Reinhard/Arcadia property remain vacant?

Finally, during our tour, we drove past a utility box blocking the visual entrance to a park and Vice Mayor Cortese pointed and said, "How much do you think it costs to move one of those metal utility boxes?" The box was about 6 feet by 4 feet, and the answer was \$275,000 to move it—gulp. Guess that box is staying put just like some parcels of land in Evergreen.

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